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Robert Brown and his colorful journal of war

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BOULDER, Colo. — The desk was a yellow-white sea of manuscripts, torn envelopes, scribbled messages and a phone that seldom stopped ringing. On the wall behind the desk was a huge moonscape; next to it, a heavy brass spittoon. Signs were everywhere — "When You've Got 'Em By The Their Hearts And Minds Will Follow." And "Join The Army. Travel To Distant Lands. Meet Exotic, Interesting People. And Kill Them."

Robert K. Brown, lieutenant colonel, U.S. Army Reserve, sat with his cowboy boots propped up on the desk, in front of the moonscape, talking on the phone. He was also putting out another issue of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, which has been variously described as "a handyman's guide to bloody mayhem, weaponry, terrorists, paramedical jungle rescue and mercs" and "an eerie new crack in the American mindspace through which fry cooks and car salesmen gaze like voyeurs transfixed toward the guns of Angola, Rhodesia and Mozambique."

"I've been called the angel of death, but that's b—," says Brown, loosing another stream of Skoal juice into the spittoon and wiping his chin with the back of his hand. "We glorify the warrior. I'll grant you that. But not killing people."

Almost since its inception in 1975, Brown and his magazine have been subjects of controversy. In only its second issue, Brown published a full-page photograph of a Rhodesian guerrilla, dead, with his right eye closed and the left one ajar; a gaping hole had been blown in the man's forehead and a fly was perched impassively on his nose. January's cover showed a small pyramid of skulls and bones that had been pulled from water wells on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. "Most,"

Soldiers of Fortune

Second in a series

said the caption inside, "were political prisoners held by secret police of [the] Pol Pot government which ruled Cambodia from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979."

Brown's magazine appeals to mercenaries, mercenaries and an even larger number of armchair adventurers whom Brown and his staff refer to as "the Walter-Mitty types." Tough as nails, subtle as the sound of an AK-47 being cocked, his publication is a nuts-and-bolts war journal that tells the way it was in Vietnam according to the men who were there and carries stories by correspondents in current hot spots all over the world. It features classifieds on mercenary opportunities in foreign lands and mail-order advertisements for tear-gas canisters, shoulder holsters, knives and submachine guns. Its letters column is called "Flak."

In 1976, both the magazine and its founder figured in an international incident when Daniel Gearhart, 34, married, and the father of four small children, was executed by a firing squad in Angola. Gearhart was an American mercenary who had found employment in Angola by running an ad in *Soldier of Fortune*. Since then Brown, 48, has been called just about everything from the "king of mercenaries" to a CIA agent, a "bloodless sicko in the throes of male menopause" to a man "who has fired from the gut about what's right with America." All of which hasn't fazed Robert K. Brown in the least — to wit, this exchange in OUI magazine:

OUI: You are disliked by the CIA, FBI and the Arabs. Aren't you worried that someone's going to

toss a bomb through your window?
Brown: You buy your ticket and you take your chances. But if the creeps make an attempt, they'd better do a damn good job, because I'd exact justice in my own special context of the word.

OUI: Be specific.

Brown: No.

Brown, 48, is generally accepted as the foremost authority on mercenary activity today. In the last five years, he has been interviewed by numerous newspapers, magazines and radio talk-show hosts, as well as on such network shows as Today, Good Morning America, Donahue and Tomorrow.

And, usually, interviewers have discovered that for all the garishness of his office and the primal nature of his magazine, Brown is something of a contradiction. Although he is profane, and does have a knack for getting Skoal juice on his chin while aiming for that spittoon, he is a well-educated, well-read, well-spoken ex-warrior who is, at times, even gracious. "Regardless of his stinking politics, he's 100 percent honest," says Robert Miller, a Boulder lawyer who has known Brown for 20 years. "He has principles, and whether you think they're good, bad or indifferent, he never betrays them."

"I like to say that all my friends have gone and done and will continue to go and do," says Brown, noting that the CIA has two subscriptions to the magazine. "Our magazine is put out by and edited for men who go and do. Sure, a lot of our readers are dreamers, men who get bogged down in the daily grind, and one night they sit down and read our mag and they say to themselves, 'Damn everything, I'm going to become a mercenary.' Except that they don't even get out the front door."

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